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RHMFISI/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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RHMFIUU/COMSOCENT MACDILL AFB FL
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2509
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SENSITIVE

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER KRD AF
SUBJECT: PRT/HELMAND - HELMAND ERADICATION WRAP UP

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(SBU) SUMMARY: The Helmand poppy eradication campaign is essentially finished. The campaign represents an improvement over last year's in absolute numbers if not percentage of hectares (ha) cultivated. Pending verification, it appears that a relatively modest amount of the estimated 40,000 ha cultivated will have been eradicated - less than ten percent. The effort may also have provided some temporary security enhancement in specific areas. However, this may have been counterbalanced as significant numbers of police deserted their posts to work as day laborers in the poppy fields. Eradication appeared selective, often focusing on poor farmers. There are reports of widespread corruption, including payoffs to district officials and deals struck among farmers, suspected Taliban, government officials, and eradication forces. Central Helmand, where about 70 percent of Helmand's poppy is cultivated, was largely ignored. The effort did extend the reach of the government, but not always in a positive manner. Cash for Work (CFW) efforts suffered from a labor shortage because day wages for poppy harvesting far exceeded CFW wages. END SUMMARY.

MORE ERADICATION COMPARED TO 2005

¶2. (SBU) On the plus side, the 2006 campaign represented a stronger effort compared to 2005. According to United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) data, 1,031 ha were eradicated in ¶2005. This year, there were two eradication forces: The Governor's Eradication Force (GEF) and the central government's Afghan Eradication Force (AEF). The AEF received considerable support from the Department of State's Bureau of International and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). The campaign began on March 8 and officially ended on April 30. As of April 28, according to UNODC, the GEF reported eradicating 6,019 ha. The AEF eradicated 1,917 ha, according to AEF figures. While 2006 cultivation figures are only estimates, at least 40,000 ha is widely accepted, representing about a 50 percent increase over 2005. If taken at face value, total eradication up to April 28 was about 7,936 ha or about 20 percent of the estimated cultivation.

BEHIND THE NUMBERS

¶3. (SBU) UNODC is officially quite skeptical of the GEF's numbers. UNODC's April 28 eradication report stated that, "The GEF's figure is considered to be a gross over estimate of the true area eradicated." UNODC's report stated that final verification will be done mainly through satellite imagery due to security considerations. AEF figures, due in part to the monitoring and advisory presence of expatriate civilians, are likely more accurate.

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ERADICATION QUALITY QUESTIONED

¶4. (SBU) Eradication quality appears to have been uneven. The UNODC report stated that, "The quality of (GEF) eradication is often very poor, with tractors making a small number of passes throughout poppy fields and eradicating a low percentage of the poppy plants." The UNODC report included photos of partially eradicated fields in Dishu district. One U.S. military advisor reported that, in some cases, the GEF eradicated only a portion of a poppy field but reported the entire field as eradicated, thus overinflating the eradication figures.

¶5. (SBU) We received anecdotal field reports from U.S. military and AEF that eradication in some cases was linked to various arrangements among farmers, district officials, and the eradication forces. Taliban forces also may have made arrangements with the local officials. One report noted that eradication appeared to focus on poorer farmers, while skipping fields that belonged to government officials or better connected landowners. One farmer complained to a U.S. military advisor that, despite paying a bribe, his poppy plants were nevertheless eradicated. AEF officials reported that government officials led eradicators past many cultivated fields in a seemingly arbitrary manner. In one case, AEF officials said that government officials led the AEF forces past several unharvested fields to one already harvested. (Note: Poppy fields can be harvested four to five times, depending upon the quality of the plants. End Note).

¶6. (SBU) The eradication forces apparently paid

minimal attention to the "poppy belt" in central Helmand, where most poppy is cultivated. This is the area where it is more likely that powerful tribal leaders and officials have significant interests and influence.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACT ON SECURITY

¶7. (SBU) The eradication effort may have helped improve security in certain areas on a temporary basis. Another positive point is that, for the first time, the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police undertook a joint operation. In parts of the remote southern districts of Dishu and Khanoshin, where there is minimal government influence, eradication provided a government "show of force." That said, not long after the GEF left Khanoshin, the district center was attacked. Conversely, security may have degraded in some areas. The Governor informed PRToffs on April 15 that significant numbers of police deserted in order to earn higher wages as day laborers harvesting poppy. The eradication campaign also appears to

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have attracted more Taliban to fight in Helmand, perhaps in an effort to protect their own financial interest and to win favor with the local population by "protecting" their poppy crops. The Taliban were able to fulfill this pledge in Sangin district, resulting in a propaganda victory

EFFECT ON CFW PROGRAMS

¶8. (SBU) During the run-up to the eradication campaign, Governor Daud requested additional assistance in the form of Cash for Work (CFW) programs. The Governor wanted to implement CFW programs to provide immediate cash relief for farmers whose fields were eradicated. Both the PRT civil affairs unit and USAID stepped up its efforts in this area, quickly devising a number of CFW programs. Spot checks to USAID CFW project sites in early April, however, revealed that there was an apparent shortage of workers. In some cases, contractors were using heavy machinery rather than manual labor. Contractors reported that many potential laborers were working in poppy fields for USD 25 to 40 per day. Since CFW wages are USD 4-5 per day, many potential workers found it more profitable to harvest poppy. Governor Daud told PRToffs in early April that workers would return to CFW sites after 2-4 weeks, as poppy harvest work requirements diminish by mid/late May. USAID has suspended use of heavy machinery for these activities and agreed with the Governor to reassess the labor situation and community support for the activities after several weeks. Additionally, USAID will shift its CFW strategy in Helmand away from the eradication mitigation campaign requested by the Governor as a safety net in areas with large-scale eradication. Instead, USAID will continue to focus on labor-intense CFW projects that build infrastructure critical to the long-term economic growth of the region.

¶9. (SBU) In addition to the impact on CFW, this economic dynamic negatively impacted other projects. PRT Civil Affairs supported work on the Helmand Madrassa (religious school) has temporarily halted until laborers return from the poppy harvest. Provincial government and religious officials have

described the madrassa, a USD 325,000 project, as high priority.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) The overall impact of this year's eradication campaign is difficult to judge at this point. The government did extend its reach; however, some of this extension may have reaffirmed long held beliefs among Helmand's citizens of the rampant corruption typical of the provincial and district governments. However, it is important to note that Governor Daud only assumed his post in

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December 2005. He was saddled with a Deputy Governor and Police Chief, both of whom are known to be very corrupt individuals. Daud has said to some embassy officers that he would like to have both removed, but this will take some time. The Ministry of Interior informed the embassy that two weeks ago they opened an investigation into allegations of corruption on the part of Deputy Governor Amir Mohammed while he led the Governor's eradication effort. The Governor appears sincere about addressing the poppy issue in Helmand. However, he will need additional national and international support for his future efforts.

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT (cont) Since the amount of poppy eradicated appears relatively small compared to the cultivation, it is an open question whether the campaign has convinced farmers not to plant poppy later this year. Regarding the CFW program, the lack of available CFW laborers during the harvest season appears to reflect the minimal economic impact of the eradication campaign against which the CFW projects were meant to play a supporting role. With the Poppy Elimination Program coming online, a much heavier UK military and civilian presence in Helmand, and the initiation of USAID long-term alternative agribusiness development activities, there is a better chance to improve security, governance, and the local economy - three key components for tackling the poppy problem.

NEUMANN